MERRY CHRISTMAS
FROM
Joe and Crow

Well, there you are. Hello again. Yes, I'm still here.

The red Santa hat capped with a poufy snowball? What? You don't like it? I thought it festive. No? Doesn't it add a splash of color to this grey world of fog and death? Offset the severe black of my undertaker's uniform?

To each his own, I guess. Okay then, goodbye. For now.

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Back so soon?

Hmmm, still here, I'm afraid. Sitting on the same tombstone where you left me. You've tried walking away to the north, south, east, west and all points between; but every path has led you back here. To me. At the center of the Christmas Cemetery.

Oh, don't look so -

- well that was childish; flinging your cigarette at me. Good aim, though. Got me right on the eye. Understand, however, that what happens next isn't because the popping ember caused me any physical discomfort. Trivial things such as fire don't concern me. I am, however, still somewhat human if not humane and as such prone to piques of temperament.

You struck me. You little shit.

!!!

And that's what it feels like to have every cell of your pathetic excuse for a body set to the matchhead. Not good, eh? Oh, please do stop screaming. It disquiets the mood. Here, sit down; no, lie down. Use this engraved marble marker as a pillow for your steaming head.

Ha! It's good that you checked before collapsing. No, the name engraved there is not your own. Nor are you chiseled into the slab of stone upon which I perch.

Breathe the air; feel the mist. Relax. We still have time together. But I did promise not to belabor the monumental shame and meaninglessness of your wretched excuse for a life; so how about another story instead?

Excellent. I take your silence for acquiescence. Perhaps you did notice the name of the poor soul buried beneath - indeed, almost directly beneath - your splayed limbs? No need to get up and look; I have it in memory: Lawrence Spear. Born April 8, 1966; Died December 25, 2017.

Below you lies another sad, sad bastard.

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"Stupid stupid stupid," Lawrence chanted, whacking the crotch of an over-sized decorative Santa with the back of his head for emphasis. The Santa was made of tin. It rang like a bell at the striking of Lawrence's head.

"Relax," Golden said. "Cut it out. You're making too much noise."

"Stupid stupid stupid," Lawrence continued to mutter, but did stop abusing the Christmas decor.

Time passed. Lawrence looked at his cell phone for the hour--2:45 a.m. He stretched and turned around, taking in the winter wonderland that Relling Park had become: Fake evergreens; plastic candy canes as large as Space Shuttle booster rockets; cellophane icicles dripping from every bench, lamp, shed, garbage can, and *'take only pictures...'* sign. And, of course, the big man hissownself - Mr. Claus. Fifteen feet tall, wide as a merry-go-round, an overflowing sack of gifts slung over his shoulder and a conspiratorial, winking look on his fat face. *Who's been naughty? I know!*

"Stoooooooo-pid," Lawrence concluded. He delivered a half-hearted punch to Santa's dick which was, because of Lawrence's diminutive 5'4" height, exactly eye level to the man.

"Just...." Golden made a smoothing motion with his hand. "Chill."

"Easy for you to say." Lawrence shuffled from foot to foot. His Members' Only jacket wasn't doing much against the overnight cold. "Christ, I've already been arrested for this shit, what? Three times?"

"Twice. And each time you do, you get another spot on a Reality TV show. Relax."

Truth. Getting arrested had been the best thing to happen to Lawrence's career since the '80s. Washed up celebrity on the skids was better than no celebrity at all. Still. Hanging out in a public park at three in the morning waiting for a connection was so.... plebian.

"They're here," Golden said, coming to attention as four dark men in leather jackets came striding along the path. They were swarthy and lean, wearing sunglasses (at night!), with expressionless faces. Each with a hand resting inside their jackets.

"Jesus," Lawrence whispered. "Central casting anyone?"

"Shush."

The men came and made a semi-circle around Lawrence, Golden and Santa. "You have money?" one asked with a foreign accent.

"Yes," Golden replied. He held up a beige briefcase and Lawrence groaned. It had those spinning number locks on the latches. Golden made a show of placing the case on a nearby bench, setting the correct code, and popping the thing open to show bundles of bills. He then immediately closed it and spun the locks. "You have the goods?" he asked.

What? Why? Lawrence thought. Wasn't all this done on the internet these days? He looked at Golden, his friend and agent of forty years (or would that be agent then friend? Or just agent? Or something else entirely?) and considered that the man had truly lost it. Like his once luxurious blond hair that was now barely there; or his surfer-fit body that had come to resemble an overfed walrus when crammed into a wet-suit.

Now doing dope deals (okay, prescription pharmaceutical deals) in the wee hours of Christmas morning with these ridiculous assholes from fuckitstan? The Golden days were coming to an end, Lawrence concluded.

"We have goods," the man replied. Another one reached around and pulled a camel-back package away from his jacket with a peeling Velcro sound. He set it on the same bench with the money.

Golden took the package and fumbled it between his hands looking for an opening, a zipper, something. He tried tugging it apart, but it didn't give. He ran his hands around the edges looking for a seam - nothing.

Sheepishly, Golden handed it back to the man.

The man immediately found a ridge with his fingernail and peeled the flaps away exposing a plethora of prescription pill bottles packed tight.

"Okay," Golden said. "Good." He gathered the package and scooted the briefcase over. The man took it by the handle and turned his back.

"Don't you want to count it?" Golden asked.

The man didn't reply, just kept walking, and two of his compatriots turned to go with him, but the fourth tilted his head and pointed at Lawrence. "You I know," he said. "You're funny guy."

All four stopped and focused their attention at Lawrence.

"From the movies," the man continued, slapping one of his friend's shoulders with the back of his hand. "The funny ones. With the *'blow blow blow'*."

At the realization, all of them broke into wide grins and started jabbering to each other in their native language. Happy, obviously, to be in the company of celebrity.

"Blow blow blow!" they exclaimed between bursts of laughter.

Oh Jesus Christ, Lawrence thought.

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Sanity Clause was the name of the movie, and it had a very simple premise: A well-meaning but incompetent nurse decides to take the patients of a mental hospital on a field trip to see Santa at the mall. They get loose and chaos ensues.

It was a quintessential '80s film - full of glibly offensive characters, gratuitous nudity, wince-worthy jokes and terrible acting. It was so bad, in fact, it spawned three

squeals.

Lawrence Spear, however, only appeared in the first and second. The last two weren't worthy of his talents.

Of the original ensemble cast, Lawrence played Tighty Whitey - a young man suffering from nyctophilia: the desire to always be in the dark; a condition that compelled him to hide in any confined space. Throughout the movie, whenever a cabinet drawer, car trunk, box, or even toilet tank was opened - Surprise! - Tighty Whitey would be crammed in there, waiting to deliver his signature line: "Shut the damn door!"

At just twenty years old, Lawrence got the part because he was short and skinny - easy to tuck into tight places - but also cute as a button with an eager following of teenage girls who swooned when he made cow-eyes and finger-raked his luxuriously feathered hair.

And "Blow blow blow!" became the most famous quote - incorrectly attributed to Lawrence - from the movie. They even tried to re-use it in part 4 (released 1996), but it fell flat. Here's why:

The set-up in a nutshell - the Mall Santa Claus is a fat stoner who hires a hooker to hide in an over-sized gift box and give him a blowjob during his little act in front of the shoppers. Anyway, that guy gets knocked out, accidentally, by one of the mental patients and, to conceal this, they dress up one of their own as Santa and force him out on stage.

With me so far? Now crazy Santa stands behind the barricade of over-sized gift boxes to nervously wave and say, "ho ho ho!" to all the good little girls and boys. He winds up behind the box with the hooker. She seizes the moment - and his zipper - and does what she's paid to do. The fake Santa has no idea what's going on - he can't even see below the lid of the gift box - but he knows this much:

"Blow blow blow! Merry Christmas!" he cries over and over again, making hilarious, eyeball rolling facial expressions with each resounding "Blow Blow Blow!"

At the point of climax, fake Santa lays a gloved finger on the side of his nose and winks huge - just like out of Dickens.

And then, after he's been safely put away and zipped up by the professional, crazy Santa goes to leave the stage. As he's stepping off the platform, he looks back and - Surprise! - Tighty Whitey had been hiding in a different box next to the hooker's and decides to show himself right at that moment.

Tighty and Santa lock eyes. Tighty, ignorant of what just happened, smiles and waves at his friend.

Crazy Santa goes crazy. "Oh! No no!" he cries, falling and crashing into a Christmas display - ornaments and gifts flying everywhere. Chaos ensues.

You see where that type of thing could only fly in the 80s.

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Great, just great, Lawrence thought. The four drug dealers had him surrounded, still jabbering away with the merry laughter of precious Sanity Clause memories. At his elbow, Golden whispered, "Offer to sign autographs."

Lawrence turned to Golden and used his middle finger to pull down his right eyelid.

"Hey," the dealer who'd first recognized Lawrence said. "You do the thing with Santa there. Do the blow blow blow!"

This suggestion was greeted with great enthusiasm and the drug dealers edged closer with anticipation.

"What?" Lawrence asked.

"Behind you. Santa. Do the blow blow blow."

"Hey, now guys," Golden stepped between the dealers and Lawrence. "We should be leaving, right? No reason to stand around here, attracting attention."

"Blow blow blow," the dealer demanded, his voice suddenly serious. "Do it."

"Are you fucking crazy?" Lawrence said. "Seriously?"

Their faces once again took on stony, expressionless features. None of them were laughing anymore.

"Do it."

"Ho ho hold on," Golden moved to usher them away, talking fast and using his hands. "We're all friends here, right? Look, you want autographs? Lawrence will be happy to sign autographs. Or you want to party with him, anytime, just let us know where and when. We'll hang out. It'll be-"

"-Now," the dealer demanded. "Blow blow blow."

"Okay, okay okay." Golden came back and whispered in Lawrence's ear. "I think you'd better do it. Just real quick. It'll be funny."

"What!" Lawrence exploded, pushing Golden away. "I am NOT giving Santa a blow job. That's not even.... Ugh!"

Lawrence looked at each of the drug dealers in turn and said, disgusted, "That's not even my line! Everybody who sees me - *blow blow blow!* - but I never said that! I never did that! That's the whole point! That's the joke! Christ, have any of you actually watched the movie? Did you *understand* it?"

"I understand this," the dealer said, drawing a gun from inside his jacket. "You blow blow blow Santa, or I blow blow blow you."

Lawrence shut up and stood stone still. Golden moved ever so slightly behind him.

The gun in the fist of the drug dealer stayed level, pointed at Lawrence's face. An eternity passed in the time it took Lawrence to draw a breath.

"Away," a different drug dealers corrected the one with the gun.

"Huh?" the gunman said.

"You blow blow blow him *away*," he explained. "Otherwise...," he tilted his chin from side-to-side. "Is gay."

"Look, guys," Golden found his tongue. "Absolutely no need for this. We'll blow Santa, won't we Lawrence? No problem."

Lawrence nodded, still focused intently on the gun.

Suddenly, bright lights flared from the surrounding tree line and an authoritative voice exploded from a bullhorn: "Police! Drop your weapons!"

Lawrence saw the gun hand move. He watched the finger tighten. He had just enough time to say "Hey, way-" before the muzzle flashed.

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So ends another meager and joyless life. Being generous, you could say poor Lawrence did at least briefly bring laughter to the world; but what of it? Those who found humor in the gutter wherein he splashed around would laugh at their own amputations.

I assume you liked Sanity Clause? You can probably quote many lines from the movie. Watch it every year around this time, yes? Make a night of it - all the sequels, back-to-back?

No? Well, what is your favorite Christmas movie then?

Die Hard? Ha! See, that's why I like you - spunky. It doesn't make you any less contemptible or pathetic, but it does add a layer of cuteness.

Let me ruffle your hair. You little shit.

What do you say? Feeling better? Good enough to stand?

Shall we continue, then? We have time, yet, and there are more places of interest; sites to see and stories to tell. Distractions to occupy us as we proceed to your ultimate destination.

Here in the heart of the Christmas Cemetery.